

## Information policy and the European Union: role and place of national library associations

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Although library associations have existed for a long period of time their role and place in the library professional community and in society are not so obvious both for common people and for librarians, especially for students.

Usually library associations are considered as non-profit and non-governmental professional organisations that have been created for:

- enhancing professional qualities of their members;
- protecting rights of professional community members;
- enhancing image and social status of the profession in society.

Activities of library associations are mostly developed around such fundamental features of the library profession as providing equal access to information for all people despite their social status, nationality, gender, race, age, physical abilities and so on.

At present times the library profession is faced with very dramatic challenges. They are developments of the global information infrastructure, computerisation of libraries and digitising of information resources. It is commonly recognised today that to survive the library must transform into an up-to-date information centre and the most important function of the library is to provide access to information.

To be attractive for librarians and play a meaningful role in the society library associations have to take into account all the issues that the contemporary librarianship is faced with. Moreover, being the union and voice of the most proactive part of the library professional community the

associations formulate professional values, missions, goals, objectives and standards, which are followed by any librarian on the personal level and any library on the organisational level.

The integration processes in Europe, newly emerged aspects of the information policy, have required a clear statement of the role and position of national library associations concerning these contemporary issues.

### Bobcatsss 2003

At Bobcatsss-2003 the workshop *Information Policy and the European Union: role and place of national library associations* was conducted. The audience (about 20 people), which consisted of students and teachers from The Netherlands, Poland, Denmark, Slovenia, Sweden and other countries, was split into small groups of 4 to 5 people. Each group got the notes mentioned above and the following questions for discussion:

1. what are the role and position of national library associations in the processes running in Europe today?
2. what should the main priorities be in European national library associations' activities today?
3. could you determine cultural, spiritual and professional values that national library associations should promote?
4. what is the mission of national library associations: to multiply successful results obtained on the personal level of a librarian and on the organisational level of the library or to create something utterly new?
5. could you give examples of national library associations' activities, which reflect the processes running in the European Union?
6. what directions of international co-operation on the level of national library associations do you consider as the most attractive and fruitful?
7. what directions of international co-operation on the level of national library associations could be realised under the umbrella of EC programs?

Because the time of the workshop was very limited (20 minutes) the groups were asked to select one question for discussion and make a presentation of its answer for the whole audience of the workshop. They had 10 minutes for reading and discussion within their group and 2-3 minutes for presentation of their answer. Answers of the groups are shown in the table.

**Group No.1  
question No.2**

The main priorities of European national library associations today:

involving students in national/public libraries

adjusting library education levels between several countries

**Group No.3  
question No.2**

The main priorities of European national library associations today:

co-ordinating different library organisations and library departments at universities

increasing awareness of increasing number of their members about measures on the EU-level

ethic issues

matters of the same certification of library education in all countries

**Group No.2  
question No.3**

Cultural, spiritual and professional values that national library associations should promote:

ethics: how to behave in different situations

communication: theory versus practice

integration

promote the EU citizenship/information policy

**Group No.4  
question No.3**

Cultural, spiritual and professional values that national library associations should promote:

national and international cultural values

spiritual values: No

professional values: reliability, keeping up skills, open discussion

They highlighted a few important directions of library association activities today. The very short time of the discussion didn't allow workshop participants to prepare more elaborated answers. Also it should be taken into account that the topic of the workshop was not so simple. In my opinion, today library associations are faced with much more challenges than libraries themselves.

The European Parliament first drew political attention to the importance of libraries in the community in 1984<sup>1</sup>. In 1985 the Council of Ministers adopted a resolution which called for action by the European Commission in this area. A series of exploratory activities were then initiated in order to establish the size and impact of the library sector, to identify areas where libraries experience difficulties in adapting to the new conditions of the information society, and areas where co-operative European actions would most contribute to the better use of resources. The main EC activities related to libraries were the EU's Third and Fourth Framework Programmes for Research and Technological Development and more specifically, the Telematics Programmes of which libraries have been a part. Their main goal was to create a modern libraries infrastructure in Europe based on the use of new technologies and on co-operation<sup>2</sup>. The keyword Index on the Libraries CD-ROM, which was designed to disseminate project results from the Telematics for Libraries Programme since 1990, doesn't contain such an expression as 'library association'. At the same time, in the index you can find various aspects of library activities and different types of libraries like national libraries, music libraries, mobile libraries, and so on. If you suppose

library associations didn't participate in the program you would be wrong. For example, one of the main directions of the Fourth Framework Programme (1994-1998) contained a new and specific action line for international co-operation, in which the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and the New Independent States were a priority objective. Nine pan-European co-operation projects were funded and one of them, the CECUP (Central and Eastern European Copyright User Platform) project, was co-ordinated by EBLIDA (European Bureau of Library, Information and Documentation Associations) and Library Associations of the ten Central and Eastern Europe countries were participants of the project. The objectives of CECUP were:

- to make librarians in the countries of Central and Eastern-European that have signed a European agreement (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, and Lithuania. Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia) aware of the implications of copyright, building on the results achieved under the European Copyright User Platform ECUP and ECUP+;
- to discuss user rights in electronic services with owners of rights in Central and East-European countries and to establish licensing principles, which could be used as a code of good conduct, for the use of electronic information;
- to reinforce the position of Central and East-European libraries in discussions about copyright with the appropriate bodies;
- to raise awareness in Central and East-European countries about the European focal point for copyright questions and information and for EU legislative developments in this area<sup>3</sup>.

These issues have been actually so far.

I think, another challenge for the library association is emerging numerous library associations and library consortia are focusing on some concrete direction of library activities, for example, corporate cataloguing, retrospective conversion, digitising library funds, and so on. They are very good initiatives but they may shade the very library association, which mission is to protect the library profession and be a voice of librarians.

New information technologies and the digital world are also challenges for the library association. The library profession has changed its image, sometimes its name too, very dramatically. The expression 'digital library' is used very often and many people think that digital libraries will substitute traditional ones. The Telematics for Libraries Programme was superseded by the Digital Culture (DigiCULT) initiative, an Information Society Technologies (IST) support measure under the 6th Framework Programme (FP6)<sup>4</sup>. DigiCULT draws on the results of the strategic study *Technological Landscapes for Tomorrow's Cultural Economy- DigiCULT*<sup>5</sup>, that was initiated by the European Commission, DG Information Society (Unit D2: Cultural Heritage Applications) in 2000 and completed in 2001. This study covers several areas of interest, (national policies & initiatives, organisational change, exploitation and ICT) and formulates a series of recommendations. On the DigiCULT's website you can find the following passage, 'Being digital for many European archives, libraries and museums (ALMs) is no longer an option but a reality. They have turned into "hybrid institutions" that take care of both analogue as well as digital cultural resources. The conversion of all sorts of cultural contents into bits and bytes opens up a completely new dimension of reaching traditional

and new audiences by providing access to cultural heritage resources in ways unimaginable a decade ago.'

In such case, what will be the association of 'hybrid institutions' and whom they will represent? The answer can be found in the recommendations of the study. The library association will transform into 'the cultural heritage association', with the priority 'to speed up the transfer and integration of knowledge into professional training and develop special courses for key areas such as digital management and preservation. With regard to basic qualifications cultural heritage associations and institutions should promote the adoption of the European Computer Driving License as an important requirement for continuing professional development'<sup>6</sup>.

Of course, it is very important to use the potential of new information technologies for integration of European countries, preservation of the cultural heritage and providing prosperity of European nations. But at the same time, it is inadmissible to reduce all functions of the library to only digitising its collections, providing online access and training on computer technologies. The library as well as the library association plays a very important role as a social institution. The library association as its objectives can determine many provisions of the *Consolidated Version of the Treaty Establishing the European Community*. For example, elimination of inequalities, promotion equality between men and women, a high level of protection and improvement of the quality of the environment, civil protection, closer co-operation between Member States, and so on. Library associations can play an important role in the development of the so-called 'social capital'. In contrast to an economic capital which includes financial and natural resources, other means of production, and human capital which refers to human labour as trained individuals, 'social capital' refers to values and social networks that enable co-ordination and co-operation within the society. It also supports the link between people and organisations, between citizens and communities<sup>7</sup>. 'Social capital is strong' means information is being shared conveniently, citizens can interact and get mobilised by an abundance of local and national institutions, and there is trust and confidence between authorities and the people. On the other hand, a lack of social capital, a lack of trust and solidarity and a lack of institutions bringing citizens together can kill the most ambitious development programs. Libraries and library associations can play a role as an essential factor of the social capital by providing space for interaction and maintaining information infrastructure. The strong social capital will enable the European Union to reach main goals of the 'Enlargement Strategy' to put an end to the conflicts of the past and to strengthening peace, security, justice and well being throughout Europe.

The European Union is multinational and multilingual. As a rule, national library associations unite libraries of different types and regions and have developed relations with their international counterparts. They can play a remarkable role in preservation and promotion of the national cultural, historical and geographical heritage.

Barbara J. Ford, former President of the American Library Association (ALA), highlighted the following goals of a library association:

- the association will be accepted by the public as a voice and the source of

support for the participation of people of all ages and circumstances in a free and open information society;

- the association will be an active formal participant in various national arenas discussing and defining aspects for the information society that affect libraries and their public;
- the association will be in collaboration with organisations and groups working for broader public participation in the development of information society issues;
- the association will have broadly communicated its position and role within the emerging information environment;
- the association will continue to learn about, analyse, share information about, and shape important national information issues in addition to tracking traditional library issues;
- the association will have provided training and support to library professionals and members of the public to create an awareness for the variety of social and technical issues related to the information society and provided the necessary background for promoting further dialogue at the local level<sup>8</sup>.

Going back to the questions listed above, the author would like to note that there are many aspects of national library association activities. It is such a sophisticated phenomenon as the library itself and discussions about it may be long and intensive.

In conclusion, I would like to thank organisers of the Bobcatsss-2003 for wonderful communications with remarkable people I met at the symposium.

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